Stryker Upd

Story by SSG Rhonda M. Lawson
Photos by SSG Rhonda M. Lawson and SPC Alfredo Jimenez Jr.

Engineers Get Their Own

IT'S not unusual to see an engineer element accompany an infantry element on a mission. It's evident in the mountains of Afghanistan, for example, where engineers clear land mines and destroy weapons caches.

Now, the 18th Engineer Company of the Fort Lewis, Wash.-based 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, is working to improve the engineers' ability to support the infantry mission. The first step toward that objective was for the engineers to trade in their old tactical vehicles for new Stryker engineer squad vehicles.

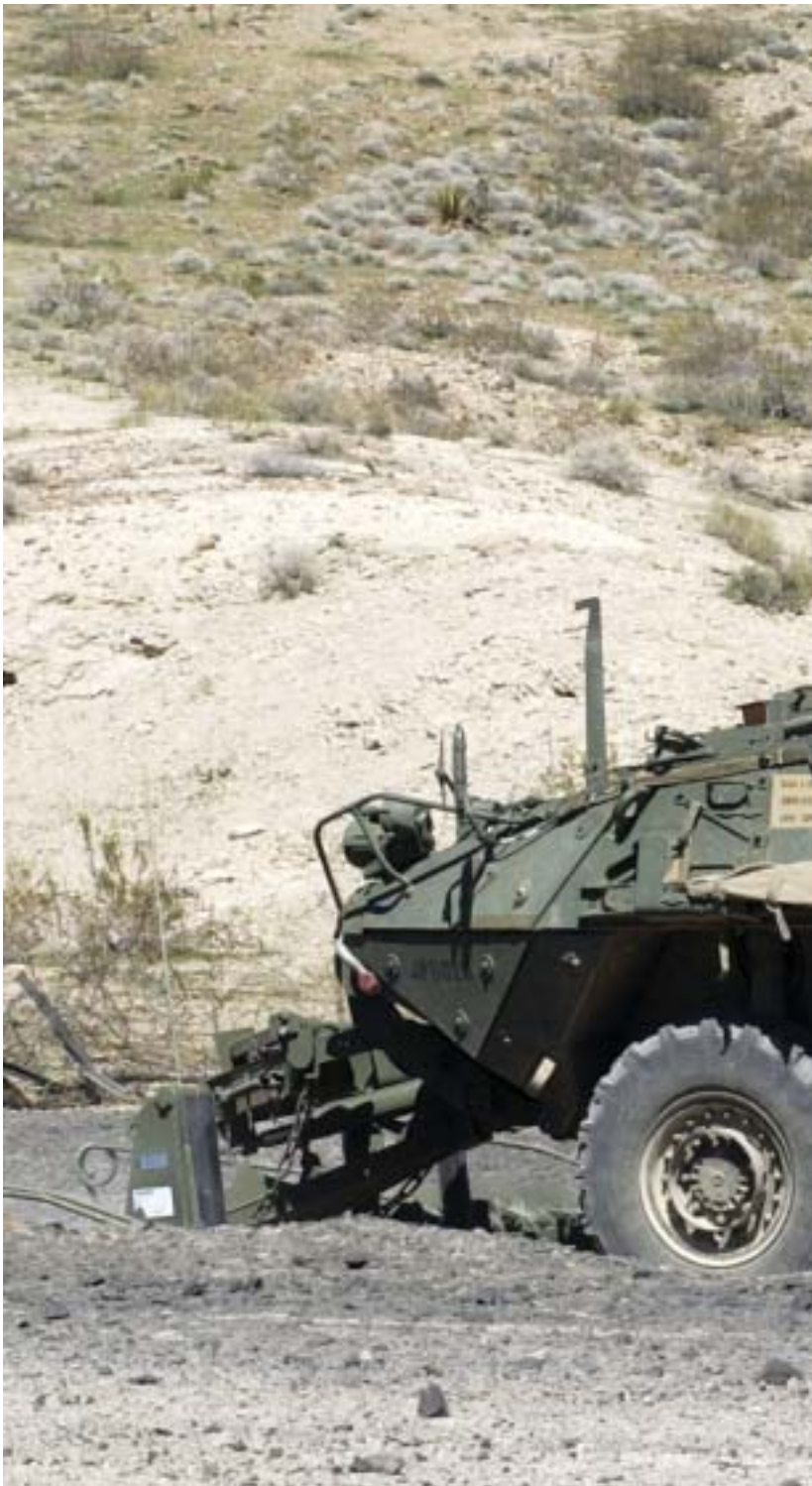
"This has made it so much easier to keep up with the infantry," said 1LT Christopher Evans, an 18th Engr. Co. platoon leader. "This puts us right in the fight. Without the ESV the brigade wouldn't be able to use us."

Evans said that the ESV, one of eight proposed Stryker variants, has the same power as the Stryker infantry carrier vehicle, making it easier for engineers to negotiate rough terrain. The unit's older vehicle made keeping up with the infantry a challenge.

"That hindered the mission," said SSG Clifford Beattie, a 3rd Bde. rifle-squad leader. "They couldn't see through the dust. But now, they can negotiate the same terrain we can."

Aside from power, the ESV shares other similarities with its Stryker brethren. Like other

SSG Rhonda M. Lawson and SPC Alfredo Jimenez Jr. are assigned to the 28th Public Affairs Detachment at Fort Lewis, Wash.



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SPC Tim Walterscheid, a gunner with the 18th Engineer Company, checks the Remote Weapons Station screen in the Engineer Squad Vehicle. The 18th Engr. Co. is the first engineer unit in the Army to use the ESV.

A Stryker ESV with attached mine plow breaches an area cleared with the Mine Clearing Line Charge.

Strykers, it's equipped with two Javelin missiles and a .50-caliber remote weapon station that allows the gunner to fire from inside the vehicle. It also comes equipped with a video camera, allowing the driver to see what's going on outside the vehicle. Additionally, the squad leader has a touch-screen display that allows him to see what both the gunner and driver see.

"I think this was built by a driver, for a driver," said SPC Tim Walterscheid, a gunner with 2nd Platoon. "Three people can essentially do a mission."

The ESV also makes it easier to fire the unit's main tool, the Mine Clearing Line Charge. This device contains nearly 2,000 pounds of C4 explosive, which is shot out 100 yards ahead of the vehicle to clear a 14-meter-wide area of mines. Once the MCLC is fired, an ESV with an attached mine plow goes through the area, making sure all mines are cleared. Soldiers follow, placing lane markers to identify cleared routes so the ICVs can pass safely.

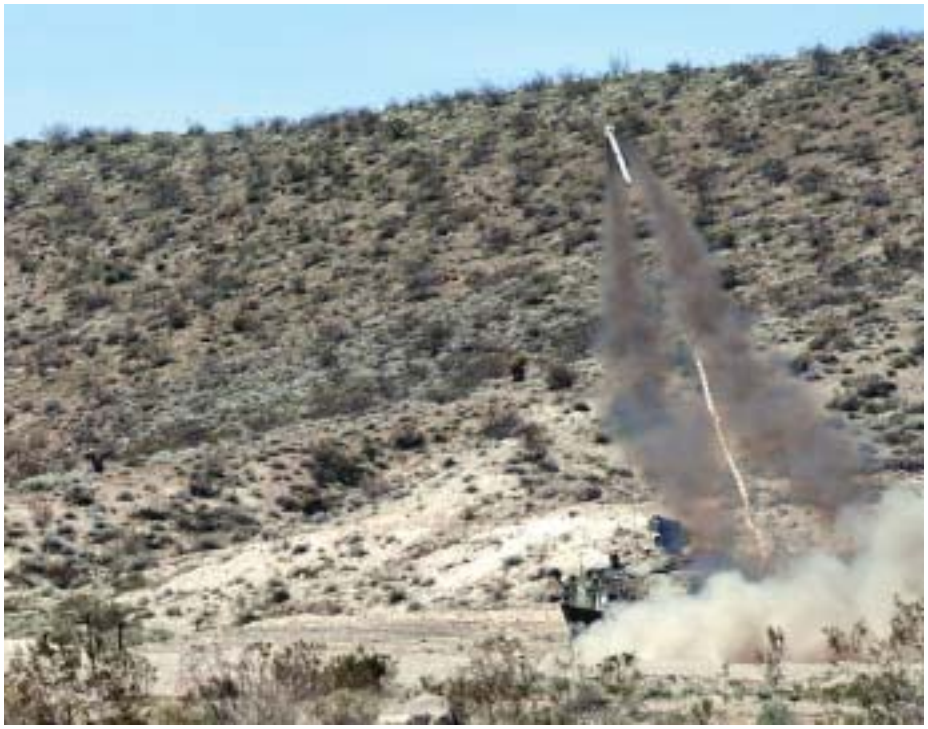
The 18th Eng. Co., along with the rest of 3rd Bde., trained at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., in preparation for the brigade's certification exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La. The NTC training marked the first time the entire brigade deployed for a field training exercise. While this may seem like a large demand for a company that only received its Strykers six weeks before arriving at NTC, Evans said his unit has handled the pressure well.

"It actually increases the excitement, because the guys got to use the tools they've only been told about," he said. "We've trained continuously for 20 days." Learning the system was a lot like driving a car. "There are a lot more buttons," he said. "But the instructors were good, and they were patient about explaining how the buttons worked. They took the time to make sure the gunner knew the procedure."

(Right) A Mine Clearing Line Charge is launched from the rear of a Stryker ESV in the "Box" at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin. Calif. The detonation of the charges causes buried mines to explode.

(Far right) A cloud of smoke billows from the impact point of the MCLC. The detonation of the line charge causes buried mines to explode, thus creating a clear lane for vehicles and personnel to pass through.

The 29th Signal Battalion set up antennas throughout its perimeter at the National Training Center. The battalion is part of a new digital bridge concept developed in conjunction with the Stryker Brigade Combat Team.



Bridging The Gap

Story by SPC Alfredo Jimenez

THE first-ever Stryker Brigade Combat Team — Fort Lewis's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division — prides itself on being rapidly deployable.

So it's fitting that the battlefield information the unit receives should arrive just as fast. Through a system called the "digital bridge," information travels via satellites, rather than by the usual line-of-sight radios. With this system, vital information and pictures can be transmitted to units on the ground from anywhere in the world, in real time.

"Designed about a year ago, the digital bridge complements the SBCT's extensive computer system and allows the SBCT to connect to other computer systems," said MAJ Brian Edholm, digital bridge executive officer.

"The digital bridge allows the 3rd Bde. to see a real-time picture of the battlefield. And the system is evolving, because the SBCT is still in a testing phase," said CW2 Ronald Carrasquillo, 29th Signal Battalion network manager.

The system has several central nodes that transmit information into the main hub. The hub, in turn, transmits information digitally to the commanders on the battlefield and to the tactical-operations center.

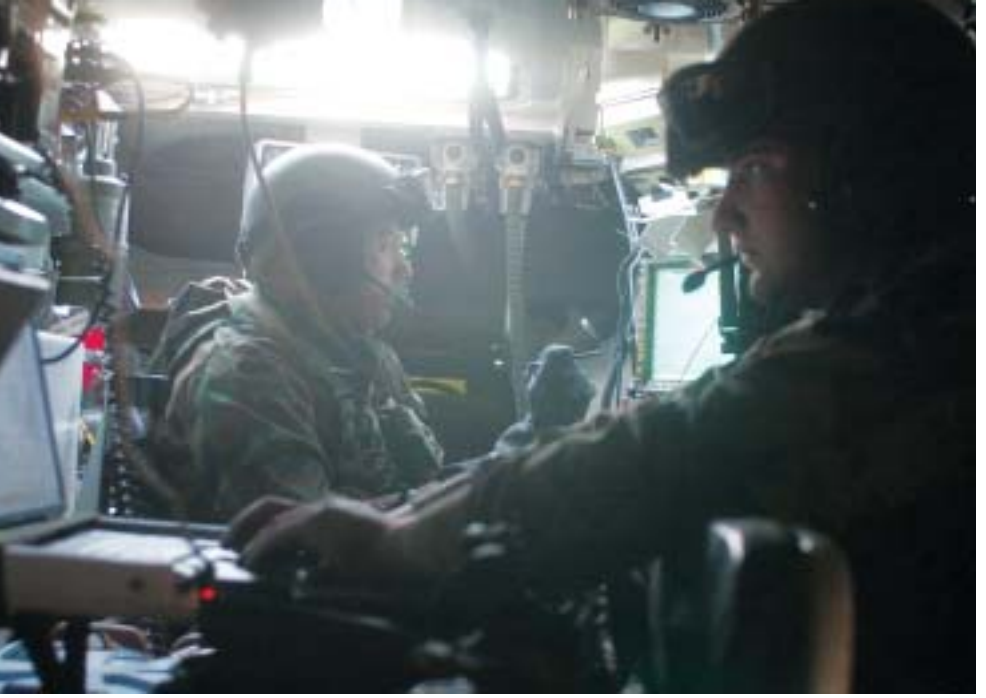
The bridge gives planners a few advantages, including tracking the movement of both friendly and enemy forces, and allowing that information to be transmitted between the commands very quickly.

"This SBCT exercise allows us to test our mobility," said SGT Luis Robles, node center chief. It also marked the first time the digital bridge tested several pieces of computer equipment at the same time.

"Before, we've been able to test only one item at a time," Edholm added.

The soldiers involved with the digital bridge are very excited about their role in the first-ever SBCT exercise, Edholm said. "They're always training and have been waiting to put their training to the test."

SGT Gregory Symins of the 29th Sig. Bn. speaks to another unit using a satellite communications terminal that is part of the new digital bridge technology.



MAJ Chuck Hodges *(at left)* looks at his video terminal display as a soldier computes incoming information.

Stryker Update

From **TOC to** Stryker Command Vehicle

Story by SPC Alfredo Jimenez Jr.

MEDICS are driving a bigger, faster vehicle. Engineers are able to shoot mine-clearing line charges to detonate mine fields. And the infantry can fit 11 soldiers into a vehicle that travels 60 mph.

So it's no wonder the command vehicle for the SBCT provides capabilities never before available in the Army, said MAJ Chuck Hodges, an operations officer for the SBCT at Fort Lewis, Wash.

"It's a nice asset," said vehicle commander SGT Jimmy Rogers. "It bridges the gap between heavy mechanized forces and the light infantry."

The commander's vehicle can track just about anything on the battlefield with its video display terminal, Rogers said. Red icons appear on the screen when the enemy is nearby, and an automated voice also alerts the commander of danger.

Blue icons depict friendly forces, which the operations officer can see. He can identify the units by clicking on their icons with a hand-held pointer.

The command variant of the Stryker allows the commander to control events away from the tactical operations center, Hodges said.

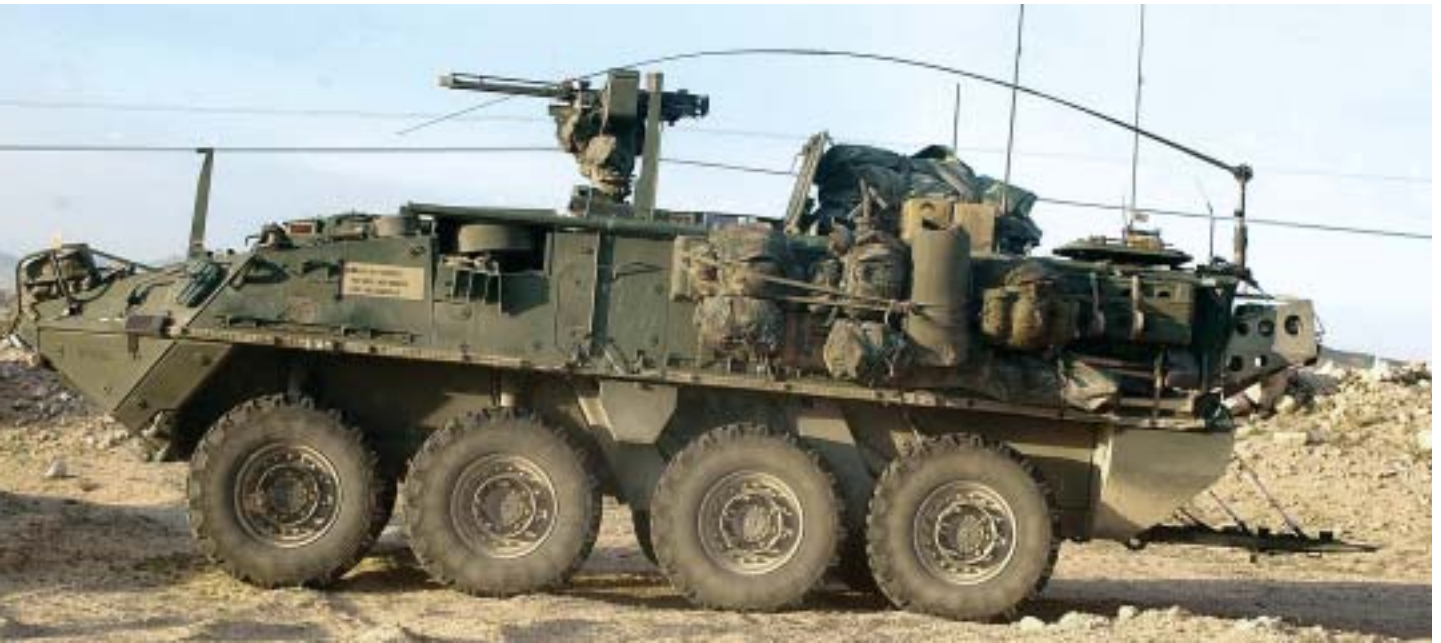
And while the CV can carry 36,133 pounds of equipment, it's not reduced to a snail's pace during battle. In tests, it traveled 150 feet in 9 seconds, and can reach speeds up to 60 mph.

"It's quick, agile and quiet," Rogers said. "This thing operates even better on urban terrain and can go places a tank can't."

"Compared to the vehicle I drove when I was stationed in Germany, this vehicle can cross mountainous terrain very easily," added CV driver SPC Mario Marcelle.

In addition, a .50-caliber machine gun is mounted on the CV's top, and a grenade launcher can be added as well.

"It's a great vehicle," Marcelle said. "Even though I'm still training with it, I know it's the best thing in the Army."



The commander's vehicle — one of eight Stryker variants — allows the commander to control events away from the tactical operations center.